Eng9-Short Stories

Symbolism “Stones”

Commonly used as symbols:

Names

Actions

Objects

Colours

Places

Weather

Symbolism is used in writing to offer another layer of meaning to the text. By using symbols in their writing, authors can add to the mood or theme by simply placing the story in a particular setting, giving a character or place a particular name, or by having a character perform certain actions. For example, the dove has traditionally been used to symbolize peace. If an author wants to emphasize the importance of peace in a section of writing or a story, he or she may include a dove in the description of the scene.

**Example:** After years of fighting and killing, the two armies met on a battle-scarred field to talk about a truce. As the two leaders shook hands, a small white dove could be seen in the sky.

Suggestions for identifying literary symbols:

1. The story may provide a clue that a particular detail is a symbol, either through emphasis, repetition, or position.

2. The symbol must be supported by the context of the story. For example, in *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton, switchblades are symbols of power and strength. The greasers feel stronger and more powerful when they have switchblades, and are weakened and powerless if they are unarmed.

3. In order to be called a symbol, an item must suggest a meaning different from its literal meaning. That is, “doves” symbolize peace or love, not fat, white birds; “switchblades” represent strength and power, not sharpened metal.

EN9-Symbolism-Stones

Symbolism-“Stones”

**Directions:** Read the attached story, “Stones” by Sandra Birdsell, and answer the following questions in preparation for classroom discussion.

a. In two or three well-written sentences, retell the story.

b. The narrator sees her family as the “have-nots” and the Hallman family as the “haves”. What symbols help to reinforce this?

c. Besides the symbols you identified in b. above, what other symbols do you notice in the story? What do they represent?

d. Choose three of the phrases used to describe Mrs. Hallman. Describe the tone created by the author’s diction.

e. Why does the narrator “lose” the recipe and then lie to her mother about it?

**Hand-in assignment**: In a well-written paragraph, describe how symbols are used in popular culture today. Popular culture includes things like movies, video games, music, television, etc. You might want to discuss the symbolism behind a superhero’s name, or the symbolism in your favourite TV program. (6 marks on snapshot rubric)

Stones

Sandra Birdsell

Mother made a new apron the day after she and Father quarreled and he slammed the door and went walking. She didn’t come away from the kitchen window for a long time, and I tiptoed around the house feeling nervous because she hadn’t noticed that it was past my bedtime.

She was wearing the apron when she met the doctor’s wife, Mrs. Hallman, out by the clothes-line, only you couldn’t see it for the pouch of clothespegs tied around her thick waist. Mrs. Hallman stood tall and slim, her red toenails sticking out the end of her white sandals and she smelled like the sweet william that grew in a patch beside the back porch. I hung around like a sticky fly in August and listened while they talked. Mother played with the pegs in the pouch and made little squares in the dirt with her foot while Mrs. Hallman said how pleased she was to be living in the country instead of the city, so much nicer for the children, didn’t she think? Then she asked which one I was and Mother told her. Lureen, the second of five, and one was coming.

Mrs. Hallman said, “Oh, how nice,” her Jane Russell lips forming a raspberry circle and I wished suddenly that Mother would take off the pouch so the ricrac on the apron would show. Mrs. Hallman patted her flat stomach and told Mother that it sure was good to be slim again and that was *it* for her. Then she laughed and her voice went high and tinkly like a wind chime. Mother laughed too, and her laughter was like rubbing two stones together.

At supper Mother said to Father that the kids were terrible. And how could she invite Mrs. Hallman in? He hadn’t built the cage he’d promised now for a month and Rudy let Jeepers loose again in the kitchen and Sharon wouldn’t come down from the kitchen table. She’d offered Mrs. Hallman some tomatoes, but they’re allergic to tomatoes, and it was too bad, but she couldn’t play bridge with Mrs. Hallman because she had better things to do with her time.

When Mrs. Hallman came for coffee, Mother would send me to the cellar for a jar of jelly and spread a clean tablecloth. Then she would sit drawing circles with her finger, smiling and nodding while Mrs. Hallman rattled her charm bracelet and talked about Toronto and Minneapolis and “my husband the doctor.” I would sit listening to her wind chime laughter, unable to move when told to go out and play with the others.

When Mrs. Hallman left, Mother would bang pots and pans on the stove or put on Father’s fishing hat and chop weeds in the garden, making chunks of earth fly up around her feet.

The oldest daughter, Emily, and I became friends. She played store with real groceries and let me watch. She had bubble gum and pop whenever she wanted and sometimes gave me sips. She had her own bicycle and she wouldn’t let me ride it. I gave up my perch in the maple tree where I’d spent the summer building a tree-house and began moping about the kitchen complaining of having nothing to do. When I asked Mother why we didn’t have one measly bike, she slammed the oven door and said stoves were more important than bicycles and if we ever got anything new around this house it would be a stove that works right.

Then Rudy tried fly-casting at the telephone wires and caught a fishhook in his finger. Mother sent me to the Hallmans’ and the doctor said he’d come over and then stayed to have a slice of fresh bread, his eyes never leaving the cupboard where Mother had piled her batches of bread and buns. And when he asked if it was really true, did she really make that delicious bread, she smiled at him the way she smiles at Father when he pulls the little curl on the back of her neck and says she’s keeping her girlish figure.

The doctor stood in the door with two loaves of our bread under his arm and asked if they could have the recipe. He said some more and Mother laughed high and tinkly like the wind chimes and said she’d always wanted to play bridge, she’d just never had anyone offer to teach her and yes, she’d be glad to give him the recipe.

She sent me the next day with the recipe which I put under a stone for a moment while I helped Rudy untangle Father’s fishing reel, which was tied to a kite. We couldn’t fix it, so we buried the reel in the garden and when I got back, I stood and watched the wind flip the paper under the stone. Then I saw Emily’s bicycle lying in her driveway and I lifted the stone and let the recipe blow away. I told Mother the doctor’s wife said she didn’t have time to bake bread.

When Father came home for supper, Mother was banging pots on the stove and said that she wouldn’t bother with bridge after all, she had too much to do. Father said there was no rest for the wicked and Mother laughed, and her laughter was like rubbing two stones together.